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EPA moves to roll back proposed restrictions on Alaska's Pebble Mine

By Timothy Cama, 7/11/17

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took a step Tuesday toward rolling back the Obama administration's proposed restrictions on a massive planned gold mine in Alaska.

The agency released a formal regulatory proposal that would scrap its 2014 proposal to block the Pebble Mine project under the Clean Water Act.

Under former President Obama, the EPA sought to preemptively block the controversial mine due to its potential impact on salmon and other species in Bristol Bay and its tributaries.

But in May, the Trump administration settled a lawsuit by mine developer Pebble Limited Partnership by saying it would scrap its proposal.

"The proposal reflects the Administrator's [Scott Pruitt] decision to provide [Pebble] with additional time to submit a permit application to the Army Corps and potentially allow the Army Corps permitting process to initiate without having an open and unresolved Section 404(c) review," the EPA wrote in its Tuesday [notice](#), referring to the section of the Clean Water Act under which Pebble would need a permit to dump waste from the mine into waterways.

"A withdrawal of the proposed determination would remove any uncertainty, real or perceived, about [Pebble's] ability to submit a permit application and have that permit application

reviewed.”

The notice will be published in the Federal Register soon, kicking off a 90-day public comment period before the EPA can take final action to withdraw the 2014 determination.

Pebble opponents said they were disappointed with the EPA’s action.

“The action today shows that the EPA is extremely out of touch with Alaskans and hunters and anglers across the country,” said Nelli Williams, director of Trout Unlimited’s Alaska program.

“We will continue to work with Alaskans and hunters and anglers around the country until Bristol Bay’s salmon, jobs and communities are safe. Pebble will not get a free pass.”

Pebble has not yet submitted a permit application to the EPA or the Army Corps of Engineers for the massive planned gold and copper mine, which would be the largest of its kind in the world.

The agencies would have a responsibility to review such an application if the company submitted it, and outside groups could sue if they disagreed with the agencies’ findings.

The company has struggled in recent years to find partners for the project. But it is planning to scale down its plans in an effort to better assure approvals and financing.

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